

Too young to vote

Task 1 - Are you an adult?

Young people say that they are grown up but their parents treat them like children. Some adults think that young people are grown up at 16. Others disagree. Some think you are not a grown up until you are 21. What do you think?

1. Is a 16 year old considered an adult in your family? In your culture?
2. When do you legally become an adult?
3. Is there something special which makes you an adult?

Task 2 – What's the right age?

Choose the right age for doing the following things.

16 18 21 Older Never

1. Get married
 2. Go to war
 3. Vote in an election
 4. Have a sexual relationship
 5. Drink alcohol in a public place
 6. Pay government taxes
 7. Drive a car
 8. Live on your own
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1. What does the law say in your country?
 2. Is it the same as your opinion?

Task 3 – Letters to the editor

Read these letters from national newspapers in the UK and find out:

1. Who thinks a 16 year old should be considered an adult?
2. Who thinks a 16 year old is still a child?

3. How old do you have to be to vote in the UK?
4. What can you do at 16 in the UK?
5. How do the laws for young people compare to the laws in your country?

Letters to the editor

There is a big debate in the UK about laws for young people, especially about the voting age. Here are some of the views you can read in the newspapers. There is also a lot of discussion on newspaper and television websites too.

Sirs,

I ask readers to consider these facts on voting age:

Brazil 16

Cuba 16

East Timor 17

Iran 15

North Korea 17

Nicaragua 16

Yugoslavia 16 if employed

Sudan 17

So why do many people think it strange that 16 year olds in Britain want to vote?

I urge every young person to write to their MP and join the votes at 16 campaign. We have to pay tax, we can go to war for our country and we can get married. So, we should be allowed to vote on the decisions made about our jobs and our country's foreign policies!

Max Brown (Hastings)

Sirs,

Mr Brown's list of youngsters voting rights around the globe do little to convince me. How mature are our teenagers? I would not think it a good idea to give the vote to a group of people who mainly live with their parents and spend a great deal of time on the mobile phones and computers that were bought for them. Are these young people aware of what is happening in their own country? How much do they care? I would suggest that a constant diet of rubbish TV, computer games and music will not help them decide if the government are doing a good job. Other European countries have not lowered the voting age because they also recognise that voting in an election requires maturity. The average Western teenager just isn't mature enough and some 18 year olds aren't much better!

Belinda Thompson (London)

Sirs,

Why should the government lower the voting age when statistics show that 18 year olds are too lazy to go out and vote in an election? The number of people voting in the 2001 General Election was 59.4% but the percentage of 18/24 year olds was much lower! If they are not interested in politics at 18, they will not be interested at 16. I will be 16 next month.

Samantha James (Durham)

Sirs,

Some 16 year olds are not mature enough to have a sexual relationship. The law allows them to have one. Some 16 year olds are not ready to live by themselves but the law says they can walk out the door and live where they want. However, there are also many 16 year olds who are able to have mature relationships, manage their own home and work hard and pay taxes. Just because some of us are not mature at 16 is not a good enough reason to deny the vote to the rest. I really want to vote in the next election and I think I am informed enough to make a good decision. Please give me the vote!

Charlie, 16 (Northampton)

Task 4 – votes at 16

Here are the main arguments put forward in the Votes at 16 debate.

1. Which views support lowering the voting age?
2. Which views argue against a change in the law?
3. Tick the opinions you agree with.
4. Would you change the voting age?

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1) 16 year olds nowadays are more mature than an average 16 year old in 1967 when the voting age was decided. They have more experience of life.

2) When young people are learning about politics at school it is natural for them to want to vote at the end of it.

3) A move to lower the voting age is not in line with the rest of Europe. In all other European countries they can vote at 18. We shouldn't be different.

4) The internet and the large number of TV channels we have now have changed the amount of information we get. Young people today see far more news and have information programmes made especially for them. They are better informed about government, the economy and the world.

5) People at 16 are still very self-absorbed and not very interested in their rights or their responsibilities. They are much more mature at 18 and ready to think about the way their country works.

Task 5 – Are you interested in politics?

The statistics show that not enough people bother to vote in elections. Young people are even less likely to vote. Some young people, however, are very interested in politics and love to talk about issues in the news.

What about you? How interested are you in politics?

Look at the letters to the Editor again.

- Which letter writer do you agree with the most?
- Write a reply to one of the letters. You can compare the situation in your country with the current situation in the UK. You may agree or disagree with the letter writer.

Task 6 – Making your views known

Some young people complain that nobody is interested in hearing their opinion on issues that affect their lives. There can be many ways for young people to make their voices heard. Writing letters to national newspapers is one way.

- Think of 3 other possible ways to make young voices be heard
- What opportunities are there in your area for young people to discuss their interests and concerns?
- Do you think the opinions of young people are valued at school and in society in general?
- Have you ever participated in a public debate? Where? What was it about?

Quiz: Are you a political animal?

1. There's a knock at the door and you find a member of a local political party waiting to talk to you. What do you do?

- Say you are very busy and close the door
- Listen to what they say and decide if you want to continue the conversation?
- Ask about issues which are important to young people in your area?
- Invite them in and have a long discussion about policies you care about?

2. There's a debate on one TV station about new laws for young people. There's a good music concert on another station. What do you do?

- Watch the concert. It's far more interesting than politics
- Watch a bit of the debate to see if it is interesting and switch TV channels if you get bored
- Record one programme and watch the other so that you don't miss anything
- Watch the debate and log on to the programme website to email your views. You feel very strongly about new laws affecting you

3. When you open a newspaper, what do you do?

- Go straight to the horoscope, TV, sports or review pages to find some sort of entertainment
- Look for articles about young people in all parts of the paper
- Read the main headlines and find out what is happening in other countries too
- Go straight to the political comment and articles about politics and the government in your country. You always want to know what is going on.

Task 7 – Citizen X

Students in UK schools now study a new subject called Citizenship. The people who support the voting age at 16 think the citizenship lessons prepare students for voting. Citizenship courses are designed to help young people become better and more active members of their society.

- Think of 2 things that you might study on a citizenship course
- Write a definition of a good citizen
- Find out more about Citizenship in the UK from websites for schools. Present your findings to the class.
- How does your school prepare you for life in your society?